

Public Values for MPAs in the Northeast Region

Executive Order 13158 instructs the Department of Commerce and other agencies to protect the natural and cultural resources of the marine environment for the benefit of present and future generations by establishing a diverse network of marine protected areas (MPAs). Under this broad definition, a wide variety of sites could be designated as an MPA. In the Northeast Region, areas that have been closed to fisheries in order to rebuild depleted fish stocks and protect essential fish habitat (EFH) are becoming de facto candidates for MPAs.

In addition to science-based criteria, agencies are instructed to assess the economic effects of alternative MPA designations. To fully assess these effects, agencies must examine both the impact of MPAs on landings for the fishing industry and the public value for natural and cultural resources that MPAs aim to protect. The economics literature casts doubt on the economic benefits of MPAs for the fishing industry (particularly in fisheries plagued by excess harvest capacity), and research on the public values of MPAs is limited. Further, to date the existing research on public valuation of MPAs has focused on use values such as tourism or other forms of recreation. For the potential MPA candidates in the Northeast Region, options for recreational use are likely to be limited, as most are offshore areas. Thus, the economic rationale for MPAs in this region may rely primarily on indirect or non-use values such as EFH and/or existence values held by society.

There is limited research on non-use and existence values of MPAs, and presently there are no studies that could provide an appropriate benefits transfer value to help agencies assess the economic effects of alternative MPAs designations in the Northeast Region. To address this need, NMFS is employing stated preference techniques to estimate public non-use and existence values for MPAs in the Northeast Region. These values will be integrated with ArcGIS to produce a spatially explicit evaluation of MPA siting and network scenarios.

Project Timeline

Jan. 05	Sept. 05	Jan. 06	Mar. 06	Apr. 06	May 06	July 06
Qualitative Research and Stated Preference Instrument Development	Stated Preference Survey Fielded in Northeast Region	Data Analysis and Model Estimation	Integration with ArcGIS	Interim Report	Development of Interactive Model	Final Report